

Nostalgic Notes from Edwin Noyes

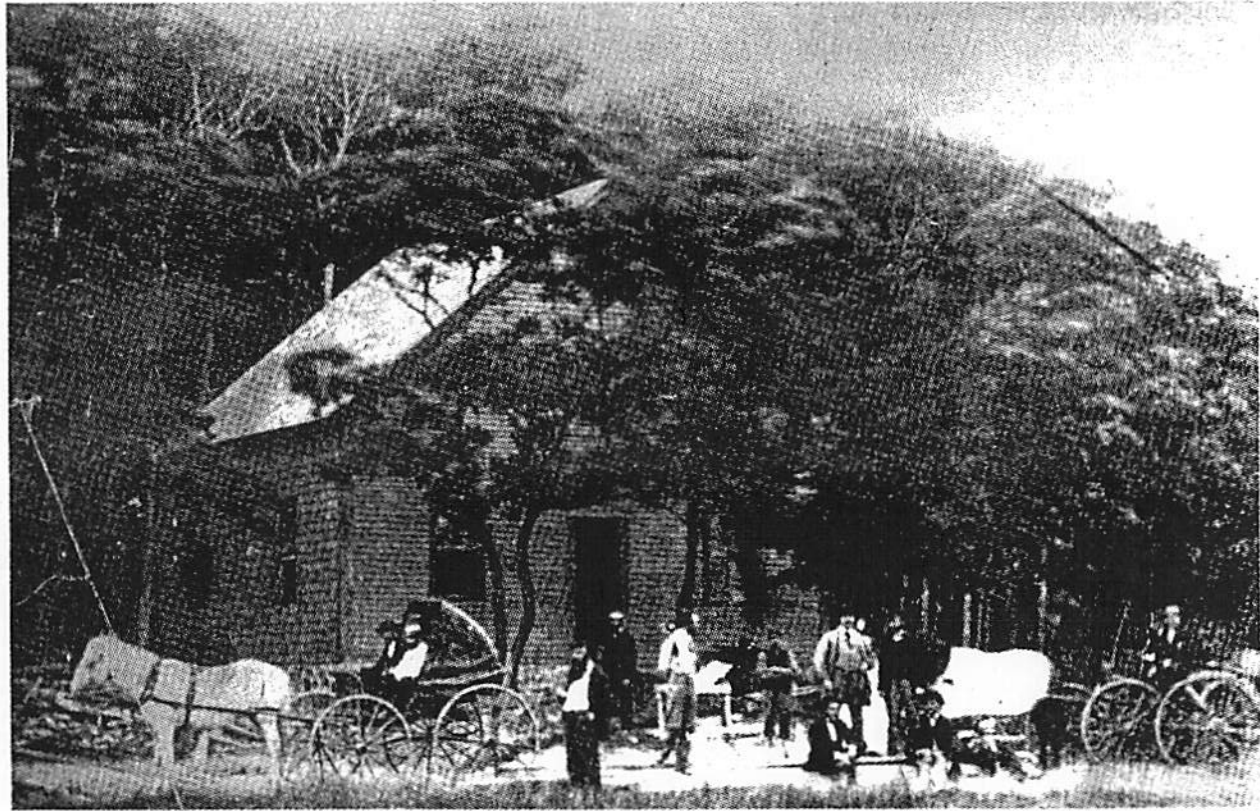
(Here are some of the observations Edwin Noyes made and some he did not have time to make at a meeting of the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society in 1963 - Ed.)

The Rural Society was founded in 1883. From time to time, though not regularly, a brief report was included in the annual report of the town. In 1889 the report said we are now about 5-1/2 years old and have 90 members. We would like to have many more. Any person may become a member of this society on the payment of 50 cents annually, or its equivalent of labor.

In 1903, when the society had 75 members, it had little to report. The watering trough at Hall's Corner has been put in order and the one at the Point will be this Spring. The society has little money, being entirely dependent on the membership fee. If anyone can suggest a way to waken public interest and increase the membership the secretary will accept suggestions. There is a great need of public dumps off from the main streets, as the unsightly one on Powder Point Ave. testifies.

The following year the society bought the dump on Powder Point Ave. from Nora Smith for \$300 and, "as soon as funds permit plan to remove the rubbish and make it ornamental." The sum of \$165 of the purchase price was collected from residents on Powder Point.

Eben Briggs and I both went to the Point School on Cedar St., though he started the 1st grade when I was in the 5th. All Eben had to do was go past 2 houses on St. George St., cut through the vacant lot where the Paradis house now stands, hop over the fence, and there he was. I had to go all the way from what is now the Davis boatyard, where my father's first house was built in 1897, and I think I had by far the best of it. One would go by Stetson's drug store (later the first location of The Village Pharmacy), and look in the window, then by the Duxbury Post Office, now the Bos'n's Locker, where a small person might crawl under the loading platform. Under the loading platform one could usually find 2 or 3 pennies, provided, of course, he did not go too often, and Mrs. Hannah Holbrook, the post-mistress, had a supply of penny candy. Next stop was the old boatyard with its red wooden pump about where Bill White's house now is, and sawdust and chips all about, though beginning to disintegrate.



A typical scene in Duxbury in the 1890s.

did, I was quite surprised to find that most of these veterans at the time were 15 or 20 years younger than I am now. There are so many things today that have changed and at the same time so many others that never change.

Overseers of the Poor

In the report of the overseers of the poor in 1892, we find that "during the past year the Almshouse has received an organ from the ladies of the Episcopal Society and others, and religious services have been held weekly the past winter, at which, and at other times a lady had kindly volunteered to play the organ, a source of much enjoyment to inmates."

Between 1853 and 1900 the affairs of the Overseers of the Poor and related subjects seem to take up a third of the subject matter in the town's annual reports. Apparently during these years few were able to provide for old age, and in addition there was much more sickness, often prolonged. Some years ago I looked over

there was a marked decrease in the number of tramps cared for. The first year following there were only 4, a decrease of 320 from the year previous. However, there was a gradual failure to enforce the law and a growing tendency of tramps to ignore it with the result that in the following 20 years the number rose to about half the former numbers.

In 1898 the Town instructed the overseers of the poor to enforce the law in regard to tramps.

As to the effect of all this on the Almshouse, we find the following in the report of the Overseers of the Poor dated March 1, 1877:

"Entertaining 438 tramps during the year has given the matron of the house much trouble, work and anxiety."

Her total pay was board and lodging, while her husband, the keeper, received a salary of \$300 and was found fault with for entertaining friends during the evening at the town's expense. Also, for entertaining

climber furnished bark to chew in school if unobserved. Next, on the left was Joshua Swift's harness shop and if the door was open we could admire his white beard. Then the Blue Fish River, always interesting, with Thomas Hathaway's boat shop across the way. This is now the residence of Loren Nass, but I first remember it as a boatshop on piles. Underneath I smoked my first cigarettes and was small enough so I could walk underneath without bending over.

Then came Eben's father's buildings with the old bowling alley behind what is now the historical rooms.

Then Joe Nepton's barber shop with its pool table. I find that about this time Eben's older sister is recorded as not absent for a whole year. His sister Hope was not absent for 2 terms. I managed to make it for one term, but Eben's name does not appear until 1911, when he was neither absent nor tardy for 2 terms.

One statistic relates to corporal punishment in schools. One of those years 24 cases of corporal punishment were recorded in the 9 Duxbury schools. Eleven of these were at the Point School. Somehow I do not remember much of the schooling itself and failed to pass in my 5th year. Rather than have me repeat that grade at the Point, I was sent to Powder Point School (where in 1914 I was a teacher). I was handicapped in my school work by having a father on the school committee as well as being a trustee of Partridge Academy.

At the same time I feel that we had good teachers, especially if one can believe the annual reports of the various school committees over the years. I would like to quote from the town report of the year ending March 15, 1881: "The true teacher is a ceaseless worker in school and out and all of our schools have the benefit of just such teachers. Some persons claim we pay our teachers too much salary, though we have no doubt that we could obtain teachers for less money, but when we hire cheap teachers we must expect to have poor ones, for good teachers will command and receive good pay, and those who find fault with the pay teachers now receive would be among the first to find fault with the low priced ones. If anyone is interested, the 9 teachers employed by the town were paid an average yearly salary of \$247.

One of the things I remember about the Point School is how every year just before Memorial Day one of the 236 men from Duxbury who served in the Civil War would come and tell us stories of their experiences. These were all old, old men with long white beards, trembling hands and often quavering voices. I think during these times we paid better attention than at any other time in the school year. After I grew up, if I ever

the causes of death as listed in the vital statistics for this period and copied off over 100 that seemed unusual, particularly when one considers that in a death report today the exact cause must be given in proper scientific terminology. Here are a few:

Fell from a load of hay; drowned in Boston Harbor; burnt, clothes took fire; caught in the draw of a shingle mill; fell out of row boat; Paris green; killed by a horse; instant suicide; killed by the cars; found that way in a barn; exhausted mentally; no definite decease.

This has nothing to do with the overseers of the poor, but again think of the information given when a dog is licensed: breed, sex, age, color. At the time I was listing causes of death I was intrigued by the facts relative to dogs "registered, numbered, described and licensed between 1859 and 1871." So we might as well have a few of these to bring in a more cheerful subject:

One hound, spotted with a red head; one light red dog; one white curly dog; one 3-legged light yellow dog; one large black and white dog; one small dog.

Then, apparently, authorities got fussier and we have one large brown and white spotted male dog named "Dash"; one white hound with yellow ears, large black spots across back; one medium sized tan color dog named Tom Nogs; one red spayed female lion (probably dog's name); one yellow dog 4 month's old named Granpar; one yellow terrier named Santa Claus a year old.

To go back to the Overseers of the Poor, we find their principal concern to be the Almshouse, first a square Colonial situated on the west side of Dept St. which also served as the town office building. It was destroyed by fire in 1895. In 1895 it was voted to build a new one on the same site at a cost of not over \$5,000. The average number of inmates was about 10. There was much charitable work done outside at the town's expense. The Almshouse was nearly always supervised by a married couple, some farm produce raised on the grounds by the keeper with help from younger inmates. A problem of considerable magnitude, however, came from one report referred to as "hoards of tramps." The greatest number being 438 lodged and fed during the year ending March 15, 1877 at an estimated cost of \$74.76. The problem was eased somewhat by the construction of a "tramp house" in which to keep the unwelcome visitors locked up during the night time.

It was eased much more by the passage of the "Tramp Act of 1880," Chapter 257 of the General Laws, which provided that a tramp could be arrested without a warrant and given not over 30 days in jail. And if he gets tough or displays a dangerous weapon, not less than one nor more than 20 year. After the passage of this legislation

Almshouse Burns

(A Duxbury news dispatch of Dec. 8, 1896):

"The Almshouse was burned Sunday night. About 12:30 fire was discovered in a portion of the building used for a workshop and a tramp room, neither being occupied at that time. What wind there was blew the flames toward the main building, and as there is no fire department or apparatus here it was soon burning throughout. There were 6 inmates who were all gotten out safely. Nothing on the upper floors was saved, but part of the furniture on Hand extinguishers, such as are now being put in factories in Plymouth and neighboring towns, saved the barn and other buildings. Supplies of the school committee and some of the selectmen's documents and books were burned. How the fire started is unknown. The building was a large wooden structure situated not far from South Duxbury railroad station and it was built many years ago.

Miscellaneous Information

In 1886 the Town paid the steamer "City Point" \$1.75 for towing a whale out to sea.

In 1887 the Town appropriated \$200 for snow removal and paid out only \$1.80.

The year 1887 marks the first year any detail of births was printed in the annual town report. Previously all that was given was the total number born of each sex. In my copy of the report for that year I have a drawing taken from an issue of the old *Life Magazine* showing a group of women gathered about a booklet entitled "Annual Report." One was apparently reading while the others were counting on their fingers.

In 1888 William J. Wright was paid \$36 for labor on Duxbury Beach.

In 1889 the Board of Health reports: "Owing to the remarkable healthfulness of this town the duties of the Board of Health, as usual, have been light the past year."

1890 marks the first year that a report was made of the action taken on the various articles appearing in the warrant for any town meeting. Previously only the warrant was printed.

In 1890 the town paid Susan Simmons \$16 for using her sewing machine at the Almshouse for 8 years.

In 1890, it was voted that compensation for work on the highways be 15 cents per hour and 20 cents per hour for digging snow. And this one puzzles me: "Voted that

the price for teams for work on the highways be left to the discretion of the road commissioners, and that they be instructed to pay 15 cents per hour."

In 1894 the town paid \$234 for bounties on seals. There is no record as to whether or not this was the year the Indians came down from Maine with a bunch of homemade seal noses, 50 or more being made from one skin, and cleaned up in towns along the coast. Of course they had to swear that the seals were caught in Duxbury Bay, but I do not think that this would bother the Maine Indians of that period.

In 1898 it was voted that the case of collecting money for work not done be placed in the hands of the selectmen to take such action as will help most toward honesty in town. There is no mention as to whether this was a "Sweetheart Deal," or one based on individual initiative.

In 1896, 440 houses were listed by the assessors. 2 years later there were 465. This was the highest number of record. Then came the automobile.

I think George Wright had the first, though all I can remember is his Pierce Arrows beginning about 1907. The first I am sure of are a 1901 Stanley owned by Eben Ellison, with Fred Wadsworth as chauffeur. This was sold to Frederick Knapp, complete with driver, and a 1901 Oldsmobile owned by a man named Walker who built the house now owned by Robert Foote on Washington St. My father bought the first Ford sold in Southeastern Massachusetts, a 1905 4-cylinder roadster. On bad hills he had to jump out and run alongside. One buyer of a new car had it come by freight to Kingston partly knocked down instructions on how to put it together, start the motor and drive it home, tacked on the crate.

By 1907 there were many cars in Duxbury, and our 1905 bylaws which ruled that no automobile or other vehicle shall be propelled through any street in town faster than 10 miles an hour East of the State Rd. or 15 miles an hour West of said road began to show a profit.

At this time it was a common sight to see Chief Pierce hidden at the entrance to Mattakeesett Court and David Goodspeed behind the big elm at the corner of Chapel St., a measured quarter of a mile, each armed with a newspaper and a stop watch. As a car approached, the first officer would wave his newspaper as it passed while the second would punch his stop watch. Edgar Reed, who gave the Reed Community Building to the town, was arrested nearly every day when he

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first discontinued I felt it would be a help to the towns by inviting many able to afford much higher taxes. This was something I had observed several times in New York State, where short branch lines were discontinued, assessed valuation would more than double in a few years. It has been true in Duxbury to some extent, but I sometimes wish I could visit the big city more often without having to depend on my own car to get there.

In 1888, the town voted to have the selectmen go before the County Commissioners with a request of the Gurnet Bridge Co., formed by William Wright. Authorization for the building of a bridge from Powder Point to Salter's Beach, so called, was given by Chapter 301 of the Acts of 1887. It was decided to build provided it did not cost the town more than \$10,000, but two thirds of the estimated cost of the town which was to be the town's share came to \$25,000. Then, on Nov. 20, 1889, another special meeting was held to see if the town really wanted the bridge. William Wright agreed to pay \$15,000 of the town's share, the County agreed to pay the other \$12,500 and the town voted to pay \$10,000. The whole matter was a bit more complicated, but it seemed to resolve itself nicely. The bridge was built in 1892 and dedicated in 1895.

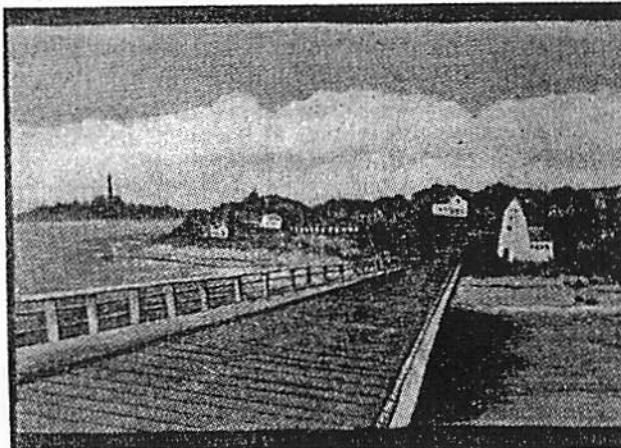


Photo of an original painting of Powder Point Bridge by the late Bobbie Cutler.

It was originally 2,200 feet long, but 2 or 3 sections were removed following the storm of November 1898 when the crest of the beach was moved inland. At this time the Wright family owned the beach from the Hummock to the Plymouth line and had great plans for

"Big Marsh" North of the bridge. I can remember a draw in the bridge over Cut River in Marshfield, faint traces of the remains of Bowen's Wharf, the dugway behind the Island Meadow (dug so Wright's 2 steam yachts could be moored in the hole East of Fire Island, because they were too long to make the bend in the Back River on the Island Meadow.) I have seen pictures of the yachts, the dugway and the mooring. I also remember a large, very old hollow apple tree at the Westerly end of Saquish which I was told was used by people from Kingston and Duxbury to deposit mail which was picked up by the Boston-Plymouth boat on its way back to Boston. Cut River is now well filled in, though I have taken a boat through to the Dyke Road at Brant Rock. The dugway is filled to a point where it is now only a foot or 2 below the level of surrounding marsh though its straight line indicates the work of man. But taken all together one can easily picture the Boston Packet boat coming through Cut River to Bowen's Wharf loaded with members of the Massachusetts Legislature on their way to Daniel Webster's funeral, or that same packet boat loaded with supplies for Ford's Store on Tremont St.

went to the post office. He is reported to have said at the time he gave the building to Kingston, that he did it only to show Duxbury what it might have had if he had been treated considerably.

A report on the condition of the town's guide board appears from time to time, usually saying they are in excellent condition. However, in 1900 the report reads:

"The guide boards in town are in their usual shabby condition. It is recommended that when any are replaced iron be used instead of wood as it affords a much more durable target for sportsmen."

In 1873, we find the first records of a railroad coming to Duxbury. This was the Duxbury and Cohasset Railroad, estimated to cost \$390,000, apportioned as follows: Duxbury, Marshfield and Scituate \$75,000 each; the South Shore Railroad Co., \$125,000, plus a loan of \$40,000 from Old Colony Railroad. Duxbury subscribed to 750 shares at \$100 each and paid for them with \$15,000 borrowed from the Provident Savings Bank, an equal amount from the Seaman's Savings Bank and \$45,000 from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, all at 7% payable semiannually. Subsequent reports do not seem favorable.

The first report covering 15-1/2 months indicated a profit of \$4.62 per day, net. Though this did not include the interest charges on capital investment of about \$75 per day. In 1875 an additional \$64,000 was spent to extend the line to Kingston, where it joined the Old Colony. From then on it apparently operated at a loss every year. The bonds were ultimately paid off and the stock held by the town became valueless. One member of an interested committee argued that the railroad brought new industry and home owners to the area and by so doing the increase in taxable property was enough to offset the cost. During the time I served as town collector I once received a real estate tax bill together with some shares of Old Colony stock with a note asking to have the stock credited toward payment of the bill. I kept the stock and endorsed the tax bill "additional amount now due on account of actual value Old Colony stock received and credited, \$50," then added 50 more dollars to the amount due on the original bill. The taxpayer, a friend of long standing, was pleased.

The trains were worthwhile. A trip to Plymouth on the 8:30 meant staying in Plymouth until the mail train left about 5. We carried our lunches and ate them on the green in front of the courthouse. The rest of the time was spent seeing sights unless we were with our mothers to get new shoes or clothing. Many a time I walked to the station to see the trains come in from Boston. Especially the parlor car and diner with colored porters which brought rich people for the Myles Standish Hotel during the summer. When the line was

their lot and road layout which I gave to the Beach Assn. Three houses were built on the beach soon after the bridge was completed. One was at High Pines, the others were side by side just South of the "half way house," the little shelter where the Coast Guard Patrol from Brant Rock met the patrol from The Gurnet. All 3 of these houses were floated across the bay on barges some 30 years ago and are now on Landing Rd. I have seen pictures of the beach following the big storm in 1889. I believe this storm was much worse than that of 1898, but no Portland was lost and it did not get publicity. One picture showed the beach where the bridge now ends to be about a third of a mile wide and under water at high tide. The dunes built up rapidly and before the gale of 1898 were higher than they have been since.

Following this 1898 storm any idea of further development on the beach was given up by Wright. There was another big storm about 1905 and there have been lesser ones from time to time every few years. Each storm seems to bring the crest of the beach nearer the mainland, and there is evidence of salt marsh turf on the ocean side that perhaps a hundred years ago was green with grass on the bay side. Some geologists think a few thousand years ago the beach followed the line of rock ledges that run North from the "Thumb Nails" by High Pine Ledge and on to Minot's Ledge. From when I was about 8 to perhaps 12 or 13, a friend and I made an annual trip to The Gurnet at some time during the summer. At about high water mark on the East side was a large rectangular rock about 4 feet square on top and sticking up perhaps 8 feet. Each time we planned to eat our lunch on this rock. The last time I was at The Gurnet the rock was about 300 feet East of the bluff and covered at half tide. When Wright built the 2 houses near the half way house a large cistern for storage of rain water was built 30 feet West of the houses and 300 feet from the crest of the beach.

After the 1898 storm these 2 houses were moved back to the West. They were moved twice more that I remember, and in 1915 half the cistern was exposed like a big wasp's nest on the side of a high dune. Following the next storm the cistern collapsed. All of which would indicate that the whole beach had moved to the West at least 300 feet during the last 50 years. One of the curious results of this movement has been its effect on various parcels of land situated North of the bridge. Some of these are laid out and described from points on Canal River; others have their descriptions based on points given as being on the crest of the beach.

With the Westerly movement of the beach one will sometimes find that 2 persons will each claim title to the same parcel of land, the Easterly one having slid back. In many ways I have always been fascinated by the